



## Local risk management in inter-municipal councils.

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**Mathilde Gralepois (7)**

*Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup>: 14.00-15.30*

**Governing the Risk Society**

Chair: Peter Taylor-Gooby, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

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| <p><b>Local risk management in inter-municipal councils:<br/>Structuring intersector public policies in France</b></p> |
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Drawing on theories from social constructivism and political science, the argument of my paper, based on my ongoing PhD research, focuses on two points.

1. How risks – defined using a territorial approach as the confrontation between possibilities of an accident and various stakes (social, economic, cultural, environmental or patrimonial) – are tolerated as part of a complex urban network system and fully integrated as a metropolitan policy.
2. How risks management – defined as a cross-sector public policy integrating civil security, environmental or health policies – represents a space of political and administrative conflicts between traditional responsibilities of the Central State (civil security) and local professionalisation in the fields of environment management, economical development or urban planning.

The study of these two questions is based on three local case studies in France: the inter-municipal urban councils (a ‘syndicate’ made up of a large city and surrounding municipalities in charge of infrastructure, development and governance in the area) of Nantes, Lyon and Le Havre. Although I do not intend to detail all the particularities of the French decentralized administration, I will draw evidence from these case studies to propose in depth reflections about the construction of risks management in metropolitan policies.

During this presentation, I will define the notions of *metropolitan* risk and policy. Perhaps should I have used *urban* due to the specific anglo-saxon definition of metropolis as a global city. But I lack words to make the difference between *city* as a traditional human agglomeration with economic, political and cultural functions, and *metropolis* as a post-capitalist informational node in a global city network even on a local level (1).

**1. TOLERATED RISK IN A METROPOLITAN COMPLEX SYSTEM LEADS TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE OF RISK MANAGEMENT IN CITIES.**

Since the early 1990s, risk management has entered the sphere of French local public institutions. The construction of administrative divisions specifically dedicated to risks is linked to territorial and urban policies developed by metropolitan institutions.

***11. Tolerated metropolitan risks***

The “*explosion of spaces*” (2) has not only provoked urban sprawl and technological development. The metropolis is a node of economic integration and political power (a). In an uncertain context of multi-level governance, risk is a social and political construction which destabilises metropolitan economic and technological development (b).

- a) Increasing concentration of population in towns and widespread urban growth led to the advent of the unlimited city. The urban system is characterised by the importance of mobility, as the permanent and tense circulation of people, services and goods in the contemporary *metropolis*. Saskia Sassen (3) explains how traditional cities have physically exploded but not disappeared. Globalization trends that affect the economy and include increasing information transfers and exchanges of all sorts have contributed not only to an up-scaling of urban realities, also and maybe above all, to a increasing complexity of metropolitan network.
- b) Public institutions at the metropolitan level act according to risks in a context highly uncertain metropolitan systems where risks in urban regulation can come both from exogenous factors, i.e. technological and natural risks occurrence, and from more endogenous reasons, in the management of public network services (water, waste, transport...), and with an easier circulation of health epidemics or some forms of pollution in the network metropolis.

## **12. Self-defining construction of risks management in local public institutions**

Risk-related policies have been developed over time by inter-communal urban councils, first, in parallel with other urban policies such as civil security, health/hygiene or environmental issues, secondly as autonomous sets of policies, following a narrative of a “must-be” policy for the metropolitan system.

Using the agenda-setting theory (4), I decipher the processes of qualification and disqualification by particular actors, with a special focus on the significant role of advocacy coalitions (5) and of “*tools of government*” (6). Inter-municipal urban councils tend to apply two differentiated strategies to create a specific position in the institutional arena.

- a) First, the definition of an institutional identity requires the construction of a proper expertise. Inter-municipal urban councils build both a technical specialisation and a detailed territorial knowledge of the metropolitan area. From an operational point of view, inter-municipal urban councils ends up with claiming to know possess a knowledge on each and every parcel of the territory, thanks to the computation of physical and human geography related data and to analyses of metropolitan and local industrial and economic changes. From an intellectual point of view, territorial risks management is seen as a cross-cutting discipline interfacing the city and its environment. It is defined as the conservation of the environmental surrounding conditions in the face of urban development.
- b) The institutional positioning of inter-municipal urban councils could come to exist first because of a lack of legal clarity in their actual competencies and secondly because of a necessity to act at the inter-municipal level when dealing with risks management. In the city-region of Nantes, local industries used to reject important amount of solvent and paint on a daily base in a river crossing several cities. The pollution was not classified as highly dangerous, so it did not fall under the legal competence of the central State. As the pollutions affected several municipalities, none of them accepted to be the first impose stricter rules on their local industries. The development of an inter-municipal institution to manage the risk has been considered as a way out of an otherwise locked situation.

## ***Conclusion***

Metropolitan risk regulations are constructed within administrative and political organisations as a necessity of urban network systems. In a multi-level governance context, inter-municipal urban councils take an indispensable role as metropolitan institutions. They act as the only institution between the central *State level*, being incapable of dealing with territorial particularities and being bound by national stakes, and *municipalities*, as an administrative unit limited to municipal tasks.

## **2. RISK MANAGEMENT: FROM NECESSITY TO THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF CONFLICTS**

In a multi-level governance context, as in the French decentralized institutions, the emergence of a well-recognized actor implies a process of reconsideration or re-positioning of all other pre-existing authorities. I intend to discuss in this part to which extent this process of institutionalisation of metropolitan risks management is another form of power structuration.

### ***21. Risks governance in metropolitan policy: the repositioning of national and municipal authorities***

This sociological study allows us to define the political goals at stake in the construction of metropolitan risk governance. The context of multi-level governance creates a lack of competences (a) that institutions involved with the management of risks capture to legitimate their implication (b).

- a) Multi-level risk governance induces a potentially conflicting superposition of competences and responsibilities. The 1982-83 French Decentralization Laws have delegated legal competences to urban districts with deliberating councils and civil servants. But, the central State has kept national administration services in urban districts with the development of so-called "deconcentrated" administrations. Regarding risk management, the mayor of municipalities is in charge of security and welfare in cities. His police authority is exerted when his power suffers from deficiencies, silence, lack of authority or when the endangered territory goes beyond the limits of his urban district.
- b) Inter-municipal urban councils have reinforced their institutional position although they do not have any legal police competence in the field of risk governance. But the transfer of competences from municipalities to inter-municipal councils in term of environment, economic development and urban planning opens opportunities for the management of risks. Inter-municipal urban councils have succeeded into building a territorial expertise in which both the deconcentrated State administrations and municipalities tap in. To the latter, inter-municipal councils deliver juridical support, public communication, geographical system and decision-making planning. For the central State, inter-municipal urban councils supply territorial analyses and has become a critical partner to facilitate the negotiations with municipalities.

### ***22. Governing the risk society to create a space of power***

I finish on some concluding hypothesis. Metropolitan risks management by inter-municipal urban councils is a political construction that reveals the growing concerns on economical and political development at metropolitan level. It involves every public actor on their field on competences. This political agenda focusing on development involves every public actors in the limits of their competences. However I argue at the same time that risks management

policies are used by inter-municipal urban councils to develop and to justify their own positioning in a changing multi-level governance.

- a) Risk is not a scientific probability due to human factor or exogenous hazard but a social construction. The labeling of metropolitan risk policy by inter-municipal urban councils acts as a localisation of most important economical development stakes.
- b) Risks management is defined as a cross-sector policy that involves all national and local public actors who can therefore be held responsible on their field of competences (transport, environment, urban planning...)
- c) The decentralisation of urban development and planning policy to inter-municipal urban councils has opened a window of opportunities for them to construct an institutional place in a multi-level governance context.

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- (5) SABATIER Paul, JENKINS-SMITH Hank C., *Policy change and learning: An advocacy coalition approach*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1993.
- (6) HOOD Christopher, *the Tools of Governement*, Chatham House Publishers, 1983.